

Pieces of Iowa's Past, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the Legislative Session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

Lynching of the Barber Brothers

The Barber Brothers were captured and lynched in Iowa in 1883. Governor Buren Sherman had offered a reward for the capture and conviction of William (Bill) and Isaac (Ike) Barber. The brothers were suspected of shooting and killing Marion Shepherd, the Westfield Township constable who had been deputized by the sheriff of Fayette County to arrest Ike and Bill for stealing a horse and cart.

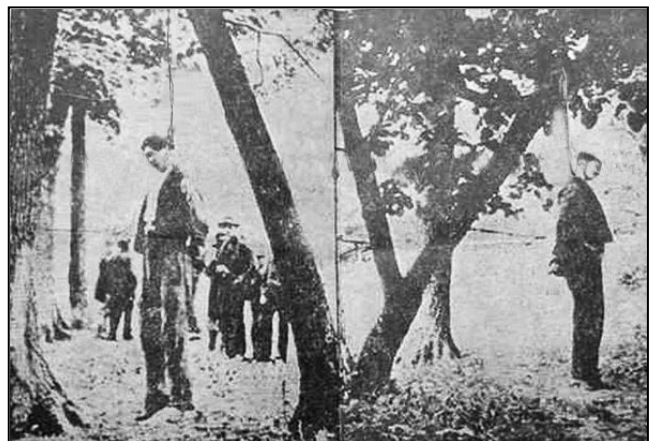


The Barber brothers: William (left) and Isaac (right)

After the Barber brothers were apprehended and incarcerated, they were dragged from the jail at Waverly, Iowa, and hanged by a mob of citizens. Because the brothers were hanged, the reward was not paid to the individuals who helped in their capture. The 20th General Assembly passed a bill compensating those responsible for the capture of the Barber brothers.

In 1890, the 23rd General Assembly appropriated \$200 to the parents of George Henry Karsting.* Mr. Karsting had never collected the money appropriated by the 20th General Assembly because he was

shot by one of the Barber Brothers while assisting in their arrest and died soon afterward.



**Lynching of the Barber brothers:
Isaac (left) and William (right)**

Iowa Laws

[Iowa Billbooks Chapter 3](#)

1884.] LAWS OF TWENTIETH GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

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CHAPTER 3.

REWARD TO PERSONS WHO CAPTURED THE BARBER BROTHERS.

A Bill for AN ACT To reward the Persons Who Captured the Barber Brothers, the Reputed Murders of Marion Shepard. H. F. 5.

WHEREAS, On the 16th day of September 1882, a reward was offered by the governor of the state for the apprehension and conviction of the desperadoes, known as the Barber Brothers, the reputed murderers of Marion Shephard sheriff of Fayette county, said reward to be paid upon their conviction; and

WHEREAS, This reward is denied the persons effecting the arrest of the said Barber Brothers, on the ground that they were not judicially convicted, but forcibly taken possession of, and lynched, by certain unknown persons, at Waverly, Bremer county; therefore,

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Iowa:

SECTION 1. That there be appropriated the sum of one thousand dollars out of any money in the treasury not otherwise appropriated, to be paid in equal proportions to the following named persons. August Tegtmeier, Henry C. Pape, J. H. Kersting, Henry Tegtmeier, Henry Ruhre, as a reward for their heroism in the capture of William and Isaac Barber, on the 5th day of June, 1883. \$1,000 appropriated.
Reward apportioned.

SEC. 2. This act being deemed of immediate importance shall take effect and be in force on and after its publication in the Iowa State Register and the Iowa State Leader, newspapers published in the state of Iowa. Publication.

Approved, February 21, 1884.

I hereby certify that the foregoing act was published in the Iowa State Register and Iowa State Leader, February 23, 1884.

J. A. T. HULL, Secretary of State.

[House File 400](#)

By JOHNSTON OF BREMER.]

[HOUSE FILE No. 400.—APPROPRIATIONS.]

A BILL

FOR AN ACT APPROPRIATING MONEY TO THE DEPENDENT PARENTS OF GEORGE HENRY KRESTING, MORTALLY WOUNDED IN ASSISTING TO ARREST THE BARBER BROTHERS.

WHEREAS, on or about June 5, 1883, George Henry Kresting, in Bremer county, volunteered to assist in the arrest of two desperadoes known as Barber brothers, who were fleeing from peace officers, and

WHEREAS, when assisting in the arrest of the said Barbers, George H. Kresting was shot by a pistol bullet fired by one of the Barbers, from the effect of which he soon afterward died, and

WHEREAS, said George Henry Kresting was at the time of his death the only son and the support of his parents, who were then aged and needy, and who were largely supported by said son who was single and resided with his parents, and

WHEREAS, said parents are now aged and disabled, and

WHEREAS, the 20th general assembly appropriated to each of the other persons who were disabled in assisting in the capture of the said Barber brothers, the sum of two hundred dollars, therefore,

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Iowa:

SECTION 1. That there be appropriated to J. H. Kresting, father of the said George H. Kresting, the sum of two hundred dollars, out of any money in the treasury not otherwise appropriated.

Newspapers

The Iowa State Register.

The Iowa State Register (Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa)
Wednesday, June 6, 1883 – Page 2

THE CHASE.
THE MURDEROUS BARBERS.
Special to the State Register.

WAVERLY, June 5.—On Sunday afternoon last two boys discovered Isaac and William, the murderers of Marion Shepherd, of Fayette, in a school house near Sumner in Bremer county. They informed Deputy Sheriff A. H. Jarvis of the fact, and in company with two others that officer and his companions armed themselves and proceeded to the school house. The brothers were not there, but search was made for them in the adjacent ground. Their coats, boots and cartridge belts were found and the officer and one man who were together secreted themselves in the bushes to await the return of the outlaws, who soon appeared and were about to pass within a few feet, when Jarvis hailed them. They were armed with revolvers, and immediately opened fire and Sheriff Jarvis returned it. The sheriff received an ugly wound in the shoulder, but the Barbers made good their escape. One of the sheriff's posse, at a distance of about ten rods, fired several shots from a repeating rifle, but apparently without effect. Willson Grove was guarded Sunday by armed citizens and on Monday morning completely surrounded and scoured by three or four hundred armed men, the whole country taking part in the chase, but the outlaws were not to be found, and at this writing, Tuesday, 8 P. M., the indications are that they will not be caught. Deputy Jarvis' wound will not prove fatal.

PROGRESS REVIEW

Progress Review (La Porte City, Black Hawk County, Iowa)
Thursday, June 14, 1883 - Page 4

MOB VENGEANCE.

The Barber Brothers Taken from Jail at Waverly, Iowa, and Hanged—They Meet their Fate Fearlessly.

THE BARBER BOTS LYNCHED.

WAVERLY, Ia., June 9.

The Barber brothers were taken from jail Friday night by a mob of about one hundred people and hanged. The particulars of the affair are as follows: A large number of persons congregated around the jail at an early hour in the evening, and a mob was talked of on all sides. At about nine o'clock a man appeared with a rope, followed by about two hundred people, and demanded the delivery of the two Barbers. The Sheriff was obdurate. They then proceeded to the door of the court-house, and smashing it in were soon inside. There were now two doors between the outlaws and the mob, who immediately procured a crowbar and sledge and commenced operations upon the

doors, it taking over two hours for them to get at the Barbers. After breaking the doors down the desperadoes were taken through the hall to the stairs one of them being dragged part of the way down the long stairway. After getting into the street the Barbers were allowed to make a confession. Bill Barber said he had never killed a man until last fall; that they had been accused of killing seven men in Illinois. He said this was false. Ike Barber said he had no hand in killing Shepherd last fall, that he had never killed a man nor assisted in doing so until the past week. The desperadoes appeared to have plenty of grit, although Bill shed a few tears. They conversed in a strong voice, and did not expect or ask for sympathy. The leader of the mob was captured by the Sheriff. The county officers did the best they could to protect the prisoners, but it was of no avail.

The Perry Daily Chief.

The Perry Daily Chief (Perry, Dallas County, Iowa)
Friday, June 15, 1883 – Page 2

LYNCH LAW AGAIN.
Barber Brothers Returned from
Independence to Waverly.
Taken from the Jail by a Mob
and Hung.
The Lynchers Led by a Brother of the
Murdered Marion Shepherd.

If an order can be obtained from the Governor they will be taken to the Anamosa Penitentiary for safe keeping.

At 11 o'clock to-night word comes that the mob at Waverly is attacking the jail with crowbars, pickaxes and all kinds of weapons, trying to effect an entrance. If the mob gets hold of the Barber brothers they will be strung up at short notice.

THE LATEST—HUNG BY A MOB

Dubuque, June 8.—The "Herald's" special from Waverly says the Barber boys were taken from jail by a mob at 11:30 to-night and hung to a tree, half a mile east of the jail. The mob was composed of men from Fayette county, and were led by a brother of Marion Shepherd, whom the Barbers killed last fall. The sheriff refused to give up the keys, and the mob battered down the doors with sledge hammers, and after a short delay brought the criminals out with a rope around their necks. The boys did not flinch a particle, and did not even plead for mercy during the whole ordeal.

Main newspaper text:

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Main Article: [Annals of Iowa](#)

*In House File 400, the spelling of this name is listed as "Kresting." In the Iowa Code, it is listed as "Kersting." In the article published in the *Annals of Iowa*, it is spelled "Karsting."